VAULT GUIDE TO THE

INTERNATIONAL MBA JOB SEARCH

ESSENTIAL U.S. JOB-SEARCH TIPS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, COVERING BRANDING, NETWORKING, INTERVIEWING, INTERNSHIPS, OFFER NEGOTIATIONS, COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS, AND MORE.

Nan Liu Barnes, Kimberly Blanchard, J. Scott Brownlee, Denise Karaoli, Dana Lam, Daniel Liu, Annie Marra, Abby Pollard, Shawn Pulscher, and David Solloway

Edited by Derek Loosvelt

vault
career intelligence

Vault Guide to the International MBA Job Search

Vault
132 West 31st Street
New York NY 10001

ISBN 978-1-4381-9610-7

Chapters

Foreword

Top U.S. MBA programs prepare global leaders, and a critical part of that educational experience happens when students from around the world come together—approximately one in three students of top MBA programs are international passport holders. As dean of the University of Virginia Darden School of Business and a 26-year veteran of McKinsey & Co. (based in Brussels for 24 of those years), I can attest to the value that international students bring to the table. You provide a global diversity of experiences and perspectives that no top MBA experience or organization can do without. In return, the promise that top U.S. MBA programs make is to reward your investment by helping you turn your passions and purpose into professional reward.

Given the current global climate, I've heard firsthand all over the world of concerns that international students can no longer secure visas and have serious difficulty securing top job opportunities in the U.S. But let me state clearly: International students at the top MBA programs are still finding excellent employment opportunities in the U.S. At Darden, we're devoted to international students' career goals and offer many resources to support U.S. job seekers, resulting in strong U.S. employment outcomes. In fact, international students at Darden secure results close to U.S. students in both job-acceptance percentages and average starting salaries.

International MBA students are invaluable assets to the U.S. Your knowledge and experience from around the world adds to the U.S. economy and further globalizes companies in an increasingly global economic environment. However, the path to securing top jobs for international students is not the same as it is for U.S. students. It requires hard work, dedication, and guidance from experts in the process. That is why the *Vault Guide to the International MBA Job Search* is a critical starting point for international students looking to maximize their return on investment in U.S. MBA programs with fulfilling jobs and careers.

The authors of this guide are international student experts at their schools with decades of specialized experience guiding international MBAs into incredible careers. While the career outcomes for graduates of their programs speak for themselves, success is achieved through international students taking advantage of the resources, insights, advice, and connections of expert career advisers who have their unique interests in mind. From decoding U.S. cultural norms in the job search to developing a powerful personal story to mastering networking techniques, the authors will help you develop a toolkit to take you, as I like to say, from anywhere to anywhere.

I recommend this guide to all international MBA or master's degree program students who want to apply their educational experiences to a U.S. workplace. You will not regret your investment in learning the key skills and techniques that have led so many international students to career success in the U.S. before you.

Scott C. Beardsley
Dean and Charles C. Abbott Professor of Business Administration
University of Virginia Darden School of Business

Chapter 1: Introduction

by Denise Karaoli, Director for International Student Careers, Career Development Center, Darden School of Business, University of Virginia

Hi and congratulations!

If you're reading this book, you're likely coming to the U.S. for a master's degree or currently in a U.S. master's program. Either way, U.S. schools are grateful to have you. As an international student, you're one of the most valued assets in the U.S., not only due to the courage and curiosity you've displayed by choosing to attend school in another country but also due to your global knowledge and skill sets.

We, as career advising specialists from schools such as yours, realize that many of you have come to the U.S. to explore opportunities here and apply your U.S. education, and we're excited to work with you to achieve your career goals.

We wrote this publication to share the knowledge and experience we've gained from working with international students for many years. Our aim is to give you the most important information you need to be successful in your U.S. job search. The information we've shared here is a direct reflection of what our schools' international students have told us and what we've seen and experienced. It's a collection of what we believe to be the most helpful advice for your U.S. job search.

Chapter 2: Uniqueness of the U.S. Job Search

by Denise Karaoli

A question I often receive from students is, “How can I be most successful in the job search?” When answering this question, I first speak with students about the differences between the U.S. job search and the job search in other countries and cultures.

Owning, Promoting, and Advancing Your Job Search

In the U.S., unlike in many other cultures, it’s expected that you own, promote, and advance your job search.

Owning your job search means you’re in charge of conducting your job search and in charge of the success of your search.

Promoting your own candidacy means confidentially and openly discussing your interests, strengths, and how you fit the role you’re applying for.

Advancing your job search refers to your consistent self-initiated outreach and follow-up (phone calls, emails, etc.) with alumni and employers to show your interest.

It’s important to note that these characteristics of the U.S. job search might differ from the job search in other cultures. For example, in certain countries, jobs might be found by the student’s school, not by the student. Also, in certain cultures, speaking about the goals you’ve achieved, your accomplishments, and your skills can be considered to be boastful, self-serving, and too individualistic (unless you present them as part of a team). And in certain cultures, reaching out to alumni and employers to get further information and follow up can be seen as pushy and rude.

Direct Communication

Another way the U.S. job search is unique is the way that you’re expected to communicate. In the U.S., it’s expected that you directly respond to recruiters’ and interviewers’ questions while maintaining eye contact and a relaxed (but not lazy) posture. This could differ from other cultures in which indirect communication is accepted and eye contact, especially with persons of higher status (a manager or interviewer), can be considered disrespectful.

Self-Disclosure

In the U.S., personal descriptions of experiences, hobbies, strengths, and weaknesses are common and expected. Answers to questions related to your personality (such as your leadership style and problem solving ability) are also common, and you’ll need to prepare answers to these questions (which will be covered in a subsequent chapter on interviewing). However, in other cultures, answers to personal questions about your likes and dislikes are typically only shared with close friends and family members. And personality questions are sometimes considered irrelevant to a candidate’s qualifications.

Career Self-Awareness

In the U.S., you need to demonstrate your knowledge of yourself by discussing your skill sets, interests, and career goals, and how they relate to the job you’re applying for and the value you can add to the company you’re applying to. You also need to thoroughly research the role you’re applying for, the company you’re applying to, and the industry in which the company operates. In addition, it’s expected that you’re self-directed when it comes to your career development.

This can differ from the job search in other cultures in which telling an employer why you might be good for a job is considered arrogant, being overly knowledgeable about company and role can be seen as showing superiority, and being flexible to accept whatever job becomes available without regard to your own career goals is the norm.

Networking

Networking is an extremely important part of the job search process in the U.S. Networking typically refers to meeting and forming associations and connections with alumni and employers. Networking is important because it helps you establish relationships with professionals within companies and with alumni who can support and promote your job candidacy.

In other cultures, networking is typically not as common or important as it is in the U.S. Often, in other cultures, forming relationships for business purposes can be seen as phony and not genuine. In addition, human resources professionals often work in a silo in other cultures, making interview and hiring decisions on their own without the influence of other professionals.

Recruiting Process

Professional Informality

The U.S. interviewing environment is typically congenial and informal; openness and some humor are encouraged in the exchange of information. However, in other cultures, interviewing is quite formal. Sitting with a person of higher status requires deference, and job applicants don’t typically ask questions or provide information that might indicate a lack of respect for an interviewer’s position. Also, in other cultures, handshaking, using first names, and crossing legs (all of which are common and accepted in the U.S.) can be considered to be inappropriate.

Punctuality

In the U.S., it’s a good idea and accepted to arrive five to 15 minutes before appointments, including interviews. Arriving early shows interest and respect. In some other cultures, though, arriving early could be seen as atypical, since personal relationships don’t rely as much on time, and being late is not considered insulting.

Applications and Resumes

In the U.S., resumes should ideally be one page long and error-free, with clear and concise language. Resumes should attractively and clearly outline your relevant job experience, skills, academic credentials, and accomplishments. In addition, your resume should be tailored to the role you’re applying for, including only those strengths and capabilities that relate to the role. This means that you might need to create various versions of your resume for each type of role you’re applying for.

This differs from how resumes are typically created in other cultures. Often, in other countries, resumes simply contain a detailed chronology of academic and formal work experiences and are not tools for self-promotion.

Individual Equality

Race, gender, religion, national origin, disability, and age are legally not supposed to affect the recruiting process in the U.S. Also, all employees—from receptionists to CEOs—should be polite and respectful to candidates. In other cultures, though, this might not be the case. In certain cultures, males and older people might expect to assume superiority in interactions with females and younger persons. Also, the level within an organizational hierarchy might determine the amount of respect an individual is given. In addition, attitudes on gender, race, and other individual characteristics could impact hiring decisions, depending on the culture.

Research before an Interview

In the U.S., before an interview, it’s expected that you’ll conduct research to obtain as much information as possible about the company you’re applying to, the various people in the company, the industry or industries in which the company operates, and the specific role you’re applying for. You’ll also need to demonstrate awareness of the company you’re applying to in your application and during your interview.

In many other cultures, though, this type of research is not expected, and researching an organization can be considered excessive and undesirable, hurting rather than helping your candidacy.

A Final Note

By understanding the unique characteristics of the U.S. job search and the expectations of U.S. employers, you’ll be able to understand and develop the awareness and skill sets you’ll need to achieve success in the U.S. recruiting process. Finally, note that applying the U.S. way of doing things in the recruiting process could prove detrimental to your job search in cultures outside the U.S.

Chapter 3: Decoding U.S. Culture

by Kimberly Blanchard, Cross-Cultural Management Consultant, Speaker, and Executive Coach

The first time I left my home country to live and work in another culture was in 1996, when I moved to Berlin after completing my undergraduate degree in the U.S. I was certain that once I learned how to do the *obvious* things—speaking German, figuring out where to buy groceries, settling into my new apartment—adjusting to life in Berlin would be somewhat *easy*. However, I found that the biggest obstacles to adapting to life and work in Berlin were not so obvious or easy at all. In fact, the more *subtle* cultural differences proved to the most challenging, such as how to build relationships, establish credibility, give feedback, make decisions, and communicate effectively.

Now, having lived over half of my adult life in Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and Jordan, I understand how critical the invisible boundaries of culture are and spend my professional life helping others see them, too.

When moving to another culture, cultural patterns of behavior frequently impact our perceptions (what we see), cognitions (what we think), and actions (what we do). The goal of this chapter is to help you improve your ability to decode U.S. culture and enhance your effectiveness while in the U.S.

How You Perceive U.S. Culture Is Based on Your Lens

Are U.S. Americans more direct or more indirect when it comes to communicating negative feedback? Are they more linear-time-focused or flexible-time-focused? The answer to both is: *it depends*.

How you perceive the way Americans think, behave, make decisions, give feedback, and more will be based on your own style. That's one of the reasons that, beyond describing cultural values influencing the way people think, behave, and communicate, it's almost impossible to describe a culture without knowing the *perceiver's* frame of reference.

For example, compared to typical Swiss or German people, Americans will seem to operate on more flexible time, meaning they'll seem more flexible when it comes to starting and ending times, and are more likely to add an extra discussion point or two into a meeting at the last minute, even if the point wasn't on the agenda. However, compared to people in India, France, and Russia, Americans will seem more linear-time-focused and more interested in getting things done in order, on time, and with less room for flexibility.

In other words, how the U.S. culture is perceived relies on your cultural lens. You can think of your own cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions as the "glasses" that you wear that impact the way you'll view U.S. culture.

Core Values of the U.S.

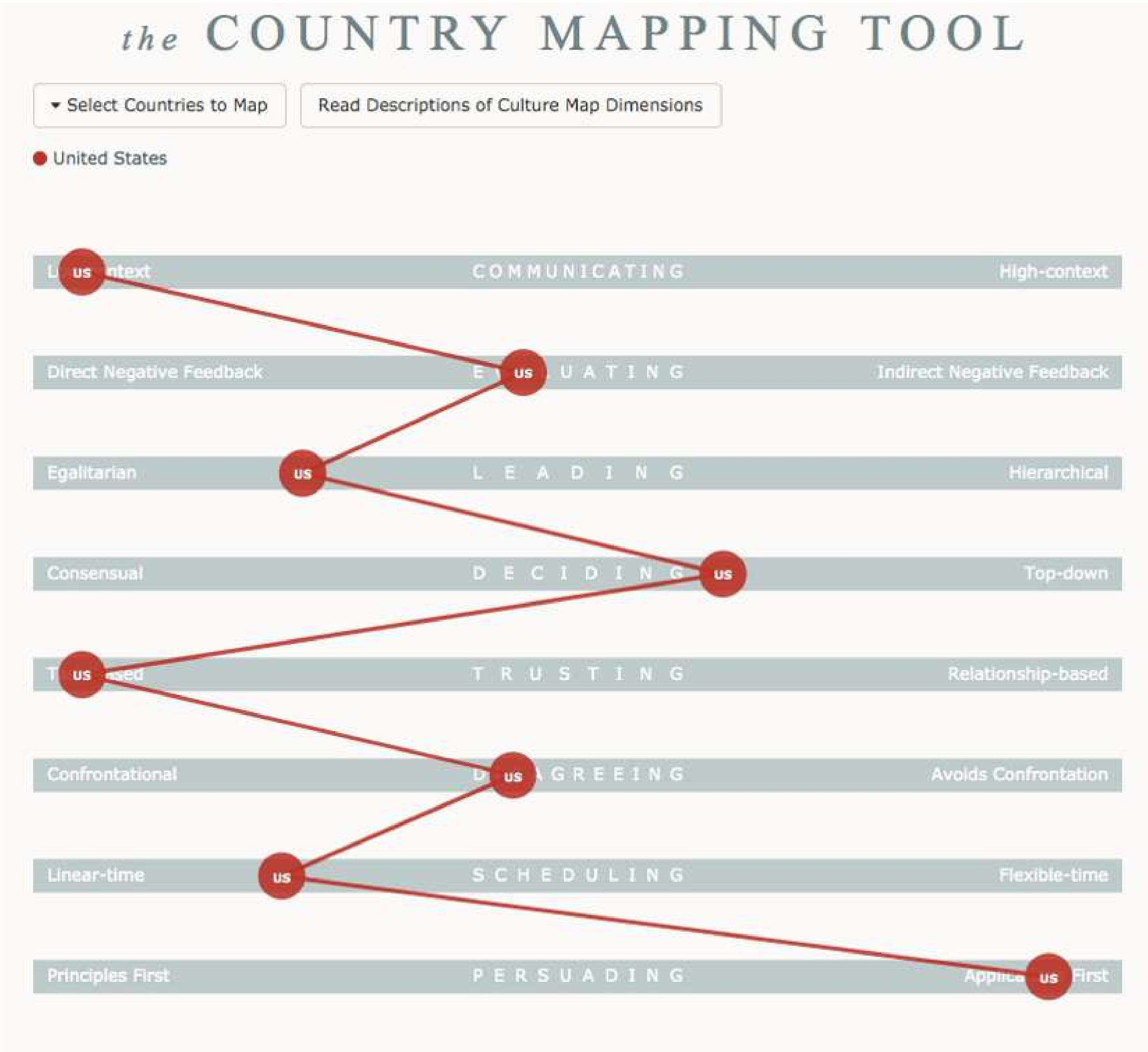
Given the wide range of ethnic, regional, and religious diversity of the U.S., generalizing about U.S. culture can be challenging. However, most U.S. Americans are bound together by the common trait of being, or having descended from, immigrants. Throughout its history, the U.S. has attracted immigrants who left their native countries in search of greater freedom and opportunity. Even with the heterogeneous mix of cultures that make up the U.S., certain core values shape and reflect the national character of the culture and have stood the test of time, having been reinforced by the ideals of generations of immigrations throughout history. U.S. cultural values include a focus on equality, informality, time and efficiency, positive regard toward change, task and achievement orientation, and valuing short-term relationships.

The Culture Map

My colleague Erin Meyer, who is well known for her book *The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business,* provides a field-tested model for decoding how cultural differences impact international business. Through Meyer's research at INSEAD business school, she has developed a tool called the Culture Map. It is made up of eight scales representing the business behaviors where cultural gaps are most common. By comparing the position of one nationality relative to another on each scale, the user can decode how culture influences day-to-day collaboration.

Below, I'll share with you the placement of the U.S. culture on some of the key scales and show how you can apply the information in your daily life when interacting with U.S. counterparts.

The eight scales on the following map are based on decades of academic research into culture from multiple perspectives. To this foundation, Meyer has added her own work, which has been validated by extensive interviews with thousands of executives. The U.S. placement on all of Meyer's scales is provided below.



Source: *The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business*, by Erin Meyer.

Communicating

As shown on Meyer's first scale, called Communicating, Americans tend to be low context, or explicit, due to extensive immigration throughout its mere few hundred years of shared history. This means that Americans believe that good communication is all about clarity and explicitness. The U.S. is the lowest-context culture in the world, which means Americans believe that in order to relay a message, they have to make it as explicit and clear as possible, with little room for misunderstanding and ambiguity.

You might find that, as a result, Americans will start a meeting with an overview of the meeting agenda, then cover each point of the agenda verbally, and finally recap all of the main points of the agenda at the end of the meeting. It's also common for Americans to collect meeting notes and distribute them to the meeting members to ensure that everyone is "on the same page."

Evaluating

On the second scale, Evaluating, the U.S. is not on the direct negative feedback side or the indirect side. While Americans value honesty, openness, and transparency, they also focus on tactfulness and being polite, especially when it comes to negative feedback or when delivering “bad news.” When giving negative feedback, most Americans prefer to sandwich the constructive part of the message in between two positive messages.

In addition, Americans have a strong sales-oriented culture, so it’s often considered appropriate and compelling to express enthusiasm and energy—even to the point of overstatement—when talking about an idea. At a practical level, this can lead to comments like “fantastic job” and “amazing idea”—which are standard parts of the language in many American environments.

Americans also become more indirect when making requests and dealing with constructive criticism. In fact, Americans are known as giving the most *positive* feedback in the world, intending to be motivating and encouraging. To soften their critical feedback, Americans commonly use words and phrases that Meyer refers to as *down-graders,* including “perhaps,” “kind of,” “sort of,” and “I guess.” Instead of people stating directly, “Next time definitely check in with me before you send the email to the professor,” they might say something like, “Maybe next time you could check in with me before you send the email to the professor?”

Leading

The U.S. falls in the middle of the Leading scale, the third scale in Meyer’s framework. This means that Americans are generally very egalitarian, believing that everyone should be treated with equal respect, regardless of race, religion, economic status, age, sexual orientation, or existence of disabilities.

Americans’ distrust of hierarchy is reflected in many ways, including the way Americans usually call each other by first name and the way they similarly greet each person in an organization (from the person cleaning the building to the leader of the organization). Another example of this hierarchical distrust can be seen in the informal protocol for seating arrangements at dinners and in most business meetings. All of these examples show an attempt to minimize status differences.

The general preference for informality is directly related to the U.S. value of equality, so don't be surprised if people you don’t know greet you in a friendly manner and talk to you. Also, it’s not necessary to wait for someone to introduce you; it’s customary that you introduce yourself. While Americans typically introduce themselves by giving their first and family names, they quickly begin using first names in most situations.

Despite the general value placed on equality in the U.S., equality is not always a reality. While it’s against the law, discrimination still exists.

Deciding

On the Deciding scale, the U.S. falls near the middle. This means Americans lean slightly toward a top-down rather than consensus-based decision-making style. In some cultures, people seek agreement from the whole team and take time to arrive at a decision, but Americans tend to make decisions quickly, sometimes during a single meeting. Decision-making is often characterized by what’s called a consulting approach. Often, managers will seek the opinions of their team, and then make a final decision.

Trusting

Meyer’s fifth scale, called Trusting, shows that the U.S. is much more task-based than relationship-oriented. This tendency means that most Americans separate the practical and the emotional when it comes to building trust. You might hear the phrase “business is business,” which points to this preference. However, in more relationship-based countries like India, China, and Brazil, the opposite might be true—“business is personal.” In the U.S., relationships are often defined by functionality and practicality, and it’s easy to move in and out of networks and meet new counterparts.

The ability to demonstrate results and complete projects efficiently is typically important in establishing credibility with Americans. Americans often see personal relationships as a byproduct of successful collaboration. In work and university environments, it’s common to balance getting to know your U.S. counterparts personally (through small talk and asking them about themselves) with showing how you can contribute to tasks and projects.

Further, Americans are known to strike up a conversation with anyone, regardless of relative status or whether a prior relationship exists. They might also smile easily and ask others, “How are you?” without expecting a response beyond, “Fine, thanks.” For some foreigners, this could be seen to be superficial and insincere; however, these gestures are designed to put you at ease. Having an open, informal, and friendly tone toward others is considered important in the U.S., since many encounters are short term and task-focused.

Disagreeing

On the Disagreeing scale, the U.S. falls in the middle, so your experience when disagreeing with Americans will again depend on whether you’re from a culture that’s more “confrontational” on the left side or that typically “avoids confrontation” on the right. Generally, Americans prefer to deal with conflict directly and not through intermediaries, which may be interpreted negatively. Further, when addressing conflict directly, it’s helpful to focus the discussion on the issue and its resolution, and not to make it personal. Listening and acknowledging your counterpart’s point of view is also helpful when disagreeing.

Scheduling

Meyer’s seventh scale, Scheduling, shows that time is strongly valued in the U.S. In fact, for many Americans, “time is money.” Americans are known to focus on saving time, not “wasting” it, and being on time in the business environment. This time-focus can be seen in the U.S.’s pioneering role in the fields of mass production and fast food.

Because time is so strongly valued in the U.S., most people think it’s important to be punctual for meetings. Generally, a predetermined agenda and objectives of what will be accomplished is created and distributed before a meeting. It’s common for the meeting facilitator to keep the discussion on track, move it forward in a linear fashion, and end the meeting on time. If all topics can’t be covered in the allotted time, a list of “parking lot” items is typically noted to be discussed in a follow-up meeting. In addition, there’s usually time allotted in meetings for an “open forum” or “Q&A” when participants can ask additional questions and raise topics that weren’t included in the agenda.

Persuading

On the final scale, the U.S. is one of the cultures that falls closest to the “applications first” side, which means general conclusions in presentations and meetings are typically reached based on a pattern of factual observations from the real world. Therefore, clearly organizing your ideas, clearly stating your “bottom line” points up front, and then supporting them with reasons, examples, and data are well received in the U.S. business environment. Logical organization and executive summaries are important elements of persuasion in the U.S.

Become a Student of Culture

If I could go back in time to my arrival in Berlin in 1996, I’d have a lot of advice to give myself. First, I’d tell myself to become a student of the German culture, to soak up as much information as possible related to the obvious cultural differences, like how to greet people as well as the more subtle differences like why people think, behave, and act the way they do.

Second, I’d tell myself that understanding my own lens, values, and beliefs is just as important as understanding the new culture I was in. Understanding my own lens would have helped me uncover much sooner the reactions I had to certain parts of the German culture that I found “interesting” and “strange.”

Taking the time to become a student of culture—of your own culture, the cultures of fellow students, and the U.S. culture—can be a challenging and never-ending pursuit. But it’s a fascinating one that will provide you with endless opportunities for discovery, learning, and surprise. It will also greatly benefit your U.S. job search.

Additional Resources

- *The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business* by Erin Meyer
- Erin Meyer’s Country Mapping and Personal Profile Tool

Chapter 4: Communicating with Confidence: Strategies for Non-Native English Speakers

by Dana Lam, ESL and B-Speak Instructor, Speak! Language Center, Charlottesville, Va.

The importance of communicating effectively in business school cannot be overstated. While it's important for all incoming MBA students to hone their communication skills, international students need to work especially hard to develop their skills and confidence in order to reach the same level as their native-English-speaking peers.

In this chapter, I'll discuss three areas you can focus on to help you speak English with more confidence. But first, I'd like to discuss some important issues when it comes to the speech of non-native speakers.

For many people who learned English as a second language, their accents mark them as non-native speakers. And their accents are often used as explanations for why they're difficult to understand. As a result, the idea often arises that if non-native speakers simply "get rid of" their accents, they'll be better English speakers. However, accents cannot be eliminated—every speaker of every language has one—and the truth is that the vast majority of those who learned English as a second language will never sound like native English speakers. But the good news is they don't need to! Instead, non-native speakers can work to improve their *comprehensibility*, which is the real key to effective communication.

Comprehensibility refers to the ease of understanding a speaker, and accent can be a major aspect of that. However, it's important to clarify what exactly "accent" refers to. Many English learners misunderstand accent as the pronunciation of the individual sounds of a language. For example, native Spanish speakers may focus much of their learning efforts on getting a handle on the many different vowel sounds in English, since there are far fewer in Spanish. This misunderstanding can lead to an emphasis on learning those individual sounds with the hope of sounding more native or, at least, being easier to understand. But accent includes much more than individual sounds.

Accent encompasses many different elements of pronunciation, which can be broken down into two major categories: segmental elements and suprasegmental elements. Segmental elements include the individual sounds of a language, while suprasegmental elements include broader features of language such as intonation, word stress, and the stress of entire phrases or sentences. This distinction is important because it will help you use your time effectively when it comes to improving your speaking ability in English.

Research has shown that "learners who were given pronunciation lessons emphasizing stress and rhythm were judged to be easier to understand than learners who received lessons focused on individual sounds."[1,2] With this in mind, international business school students should focus on improving those suprasegmental aspects of their English pronunciation, which will in turn lead to increased comprehensibility.

Here are three elements of pronunciation worth spending time and effort on improving:

1. Intonation

Intonation refers to the way that a speaker's voice rises and falls throughout phrases and sentences. Intonation indicates to the listener the type of sentence being said and how the speaker feels about it. Incorrect intonation can lead to serious misunderstandings and cause the speaker to appear impolite. For example, a rising pitch is used at the end of many questions in English. However, Hindi and Punjabi speakers, because of the intonation patterns of their native languages, often replace this with a rising then falling pitch, which will be interpreted as rude by most native English speakers.[3]

2. Word Stress

Word stress concerns the way that emphasis is distributed among the syllables in a word. Typically, words with two or more syllables require emphasis on only one of those syllables, while the other syllables are less pronounced. There are many word stress patterns in English with words that can function as both nouns and verbs and words that have certain prefixes or suffixes. Emphasizing the wrong syllable can often result in listeners not understanding which word the speaker is trying to say. For example, because most Chinese words have only one syllable, native Chinese speakers struggle to find and emphasize the correct syllable, making communication quite challenging.

3. Sentence Stress or Rhythm

Sentence stress or rhythm relates to the emphasis that occurs on certain words more so than others in whole sentences. In English, words that are essential to a listener's understanding (usually nouns and verbs) are emphasized, while words that could be left out without compromising the meaning of the sentence are less pronounced. The rhythm of English sentences depends only on those stressed words and the stressed syllables within them. As an example, many native Korean speakers find sentence stress in English challenging because in their native language, the rhythm of sentences depends on the total number of syllables, not just the stressed ones. Incorrect rhythm can cause speakers to sound like they are working overtime to say anything at all, leading to bored or frustrated listeners.

Take some time to learn about these three elements of pronunciation using the resources listed below. To practice, solicit candid feedback from a trusted conversation partner, or listen to samples of proficient English speakers and record yourself trying to match their intonation, word stress, and sentence stress. Play the two recordings back to back and analyze the differences, trying each time to hear the differences and match your pronunciation as closely as possible to the sample.

Remember, there is no need to sound like a native English speaker in order to communicate effectively. As long as your English is comprehensible—much of which depends on the elements listed above—you will be on your way to communicating with confidence in English!

Footnotes

1. "The Effects of Pronunciation Instruction on the Accuracy, Fluency, and Complexity of L2 Accented Speech" by Tracey Derwing and Marian Rossiter
2. *How Languages Are Learned* by Patsy Lightbrown and Nina Spada
3. *Teaching American English Pronunciation* by Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich

Additional Resources

- Rachel's English: Pay particular attention to the intonation, linking, rhythm, and stress video categories.
- Pronuncian Podcasts: Here you'll find over 200 podcasts dedicated to explaining and exemplifying specific aspects of pronunciation.
- Word Reference: This online dictionary provides clear pronunciation examples of nearly any word you can think of.
- Spoken Skills Student Activities: This website provides exercises for listening to polite and rude intonation as well as contrasting stress patterns for nouns and verbs. It also allows you to record yourself and compare.
- B-Speak! Online English Coaching

Chapter 5: Branding and Presence

by Daniel Liu, Director, Full-Time MBA Career Management, McCombs School of Business, University of Texas at Austin; J. Scott Brownlee, Career Consultant, Texas McCombs Full-Time MBA Program, University of Texas at Austin; and Abby Pollard, Career Consultant, Texas McCombs Full-Time MBA Program, University of Texas at Austin

"*Your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room*"*—Jeff Bezos, Amazon Founder, Chairman, and CEO*

Your personal brand is one of the most important assets you have, and no one will curate it for you. Unfortunately, you likely won't have the headspace or time to effectively deal with your branding during your MBA program, so getting a jump start now is imperative. This chapter covers three key steps to help you improve your brand and presence.

Step 1: Identify the Unique Strengths That Differentiate You from Other International or Domestic Students.

In a competitive pool of MBA candidates, you will need to reflect upon and identify the experiences and strengths that truly differentiate you from your peers. For example, as an international student, "having a global perspective" is not unique. "Strategic," "analytical," and "a problem solver" are also not that unique to MBA students. In some cases, you'll need to do some research (see Step 2 below) in order to fully understand how you might be uniquely qualified for a role.

One assessment that could help you get a jump start on your strengths is CliftonStrengths, formerly Clifton StrengthsFinder. Another method is collecting feedback from a wide range of individuals, including colleagues, direct reports, managers, close friends, and even family. Note: if you are planning to switch function or industry, clearly articulating your strengths is key to identifying the transferable skills and experiences that make you a competitive candidate without prior direct experience.

Step 2: Research the Market and Roles You're Targeting for Internships or Post-MBA Opportunities

To be successful in the U.S. job market, it will be imperative to challenge all of your assumptions about the skills you perceive as most valuable, as they're different in the U.S. than in other international markets. And the only way to discover the hiring realities you'll face while in the U.S. is to use a data-driven approach to conduct outreach to U.S. employees at companies where you'd like to work.

To do that, use Steve Dalton's 2-Hour Job Search method. The method sets you up with an actionable workflow of four to five people to identify at each of the 30 to 40 companies you're targeting. Try to connect with each of these professionals for a 10- to 15-minute info chat, in which you will:

- Identify what energizes them (what about their job makes them want to keep doing it)
- Ask them which key skills hiring managers on their team are looking for
- Identify their team's pain points (what's giving them trouble, and which points you should research solutions for and reference during the interview process)

Note that you should expect a 10- to 20-percent response rate of professionals you reach out to for these chats. This low response rate is why you need to target such a large number of people —the majority won't respond. However, those who do respond will provide you with valuable information that will help you deepen your knowledge of what the U.S. job market is supporting, including:

- Which roles are the most competitive (for example, product management roles are hard to get)
- Which roles have the most growth (tech operations roles in the U.S. are currently not that popular with students but have a high market need)
- Which roles excite you (once you talk to product managers, you might realize you don't like their lifestyles or the headache of learning how to code)

During the process of conducting this outreach, you'll likely change some of your career goals as you begin to realize that some of them are aspirational as opposed to possible. This is a natural step in the job search process. To help with this process, be sure to use the career services support available through your MBA program to talk through your goals and develop strategic plans for how to achieve them when they change.

Also, keep in mind that it's very likely that your long-term career goal (for example, product management) may not be attainable within three to five years after graduation. You should therefore seek roles that are stepping stones to your long-term goal, even as you pursue it simultaneously. Product marketing management, for example, can be a great stepping stone to product management.

Step 3. Connect Your Strengths to Market Needs and Practice Pitching This in Your Informational Interviews/Coffee Chats.

There are three important characteristics of a personal brand: clarity (your headlines and bio across platforms clearly identify your brand), consistency (your message is the same across all platforms), and constancy (engagement is key, so figure out which platform works best for you with respect to engagement).

Once you've identified your unique skills for the market you're targeting, you then have the material that feeds into your elevator pitch, your resume, your online presence, and your prepared interview responses.

The next step is to work on articulating your brand clearly. Your first few outreach conversations will be uncomfortable, but as you refine your pitch and it becomes clearer to the individuals you're speaking with that you're invested and have done your research, they'll be more willing and able to help you. Feel free to even ask them, "How was my pitch? What would have made it clearer?" It's a good idea to practice your pitch and ask for feedback. Here's another feedback question: "What job [or function] do you think I'm applying for?" If it isn't clear, then your pitch needs more clarity.

Note that in today's digital world, it's very easy for a company representative to meet you in person at a networking event and, later at the event, Google you and look you up online (it happens!). So, you must work diligently to keep your brand consistent.

Here's an example: You've been focused on investment banking recruiting so you create a LinkedIn profile. However, you haven't uploaded a headshot and your profile summary says, "Looking for an investment banking opportunity after my MBA." You show up at a career fair and really enjoy talking to recruiters about product marketing roles. Even if you had some positive conversations and recruiters verbally expressed an interest in talking to you more, the moment they go online and see your profile, they'll start to question whether or not you're a viable candidate.

LinkedIn is the recommended professional networking platform in the U.S. It's the number one way for you to build your brand constancy. For example, say that you're targeting product marketing roles and have done your outreach research. You know that your top three companies all value creative written communication. Creating and posting content on LinkedIn over the next six months and developing a followership of 10,000 LinkedIn followers would demonstrate that skill set. That's more powerful than a resume—in fact, you can put that on your resume!

A word of caution: Don't just create video content because it's trendy. Remember to connect your strengths based on your market research to develop what sets you uniquely apart.

Other Social Media Platforms

Most individuals have created Facebook profiles for personal reasons, not professional ones. This immediately differentiates Facebook from LinkedIn. As for Facebook, it's a good idea to keep your Facebook profile private and restrict what's publicly available.

As you conduct your outreach and research, pay attention to which digital spaces your target companies spend their time on. Obviously, you need to be obsessed about Facebook if Facebook is one of your top target companies. And Facebook can be a great research tool to discover and learn about business-to-consumer (B2C) brands before you conduct your outreach.

Also, some brands have used Twitter effectively to hire for various roles. For example, if a company is looking to hire a social media marketing manager, sourcing applications from Twitter makes sense. Remember, the same philosophy about LinkedIn (clarity and consistency) should apply to Twitter and Instagram as well.

How to Make a Positive First Impression

One of the most important parts of having a strong personal brand is simply being "likable.” That doesn’t mean branding is a popularity contest, but it does mean that making positive first impressions with company representatives are important to your success in the job search process. A first impression can have a truly lasting impact—whether positive or negative. Here's a list of ways to be “likable” when engaging in the recruiting process.

1. Approach Networking Conversations with Genuine Curiosity

Most people feel honored when another person takes a sincere interest in what they do and how they do it. A few thoughtful questions can be extremely helpful to drive conversations forward and increase other people’s positive impression of you. But keep your questions focused on the other person's career journey, experience, and current projects. And be sure to steer clear of overly personal subjects like salary, as well as questions around a company's sponsorship policy.

2. Use Nonverbal Communication to Your Advantage

Don't just rely on your words to make a positive impression—let your facial expressions and body language do the “talking” as well. Remember to smile occasionally throughout your conversations, especially when the other person says something pleasing or interesting. Slightly leaning your body forward also denotes interest in the other person. Speaking clearly and calmly can give the impression of confidence. And maintain good posture, avoiding “closed” body postures like crossing your arms in front of your body. In Western cultures, such gestures can be interpreted as disinterest or even hostility.

3. Know Yourself

As you move forward in the recruitment process you’ll be presented with opportunities to articulate your unique strengths and value. Be sure you can clearly explain how your background, education, skills, and talents would be beneficial to a particular company in a particular position. Be specific and speak confidently about your unique strengths without being arrogant or brash.

4. Dress for Success

While we all want to be evaluated primarily on our cognitive abilities and personality, the reality is that one's physical appearance leaves a lasting impression as well. That doesn't mean you have to purchase an expensive designer suit. However, you should select attire that’s clean, properly fitted to your body, and appropriate for the particular occasion. Select simple items that can be mixed and matched to maximize efficiency. For example, a simple dark gray skirt or pair of trousers paired with a white or light blue dress shirt or blouse will give a polished and professional look for networking events where business casual attire is appropriate. You want your unique strengths to be what people remember about you, rather than any distracting attire choices. At a career fair, when there are hundreds of competitive candidates being evaluated, those small distractions might be the only thing a recruiter remembers about you.

Additional Resources

- CliftonStrengths
- *The 2-Hour Job Search: Using Technology to Get the Right Job Faster* by Steve Dalton

Chapter 6: Small Talk Savvy

by David Solloway, Assistant Director, Daytime MBA Career Services, Duke University's Fuqua School of Business

If there's one activity that occurs at nearly every stage of the U.S. job search, it's small talk. And unlike other aspects of the job search, small talk usually happens without warning. So to be successful in the job search, you need to be ready to engage in small talk at a moment's notice. That means you need to be small talk savvy.

What Is Small Talk?

Have you ever had someone ask you, "How was your flight?" in the first few moments after saying "Hello"? If so, you've experienced someone attempting to conduct small talk. Small talk is often a light conversation between people sharing the same social space. During the job search, small talk occurs in many moments, such as when you're attending a networking event, walking to the same meeting room, or during the first few minutes of an informational call.

What Is the Goal of Small Talk?

The goal of small talk is to build likability and trust in a manner that aligns with your target audience's cultural preferences. In other words, after people conduct small talk with you, you want them to think that they like you and trust that continuing a relationship with you will be good for them. If you can get a person to think that way, you're taking the first steps towards building a relationship with someone who will advocate for you when hiring managers are asking who should receive an offer.

Small talk can be very challenging for international job seekers due to the multitude of social norms that arise. Below are a few of the common U.S. small talk actions that can be particularly challenging for international students:

- Addressing all small talk participants by their first names (even if they're in executive roles)
- Initiating conversation by posing questions to strangers and/or senior executives
- Following up on responses to questions without being prompted
- Discussing topics you're not familiar with (U.S. football, U.S. holidays, etc.)
- Avoiding topics considered inappropriate to talk about during the job search in the U.S. (religion, relationship status, personal finances, politics)
- Interpreting body language to know whether to keep talking, change the topic, or end the conversation

The underlying social norm of small talk is that U.S. relationships are primarily task-based: U.S. business relationships quickly fade once an individual's goals or tasks are achieved. That speed of relationship development requires job seekers to be prepared to conduct themselves in a manner considered trustworthy by the cultural norm.

So, How Do You Prepare for Small Talk Success?

Preparing for small talk success begins with familiarizing yourself with the typical structure of small talk. Most small talk conversations have a three-part structure: 1) question, 2) listen, and 3) respond.

Question

After you meet someone and say "Hello, I'm <name>," you're ready to begin small talk. The first step of small talk can be initiated by anyone; status (age, level of employment, etc.) doesn't matter. Starting with "How are you today, <name>?" is a simple and effective way to begin building likability and trust. Saying your small talk partner's name shows you're listening to your partner and releases feel-good chemicals in your partner's brain, which your partner will associate with you.

As Steve Dalton, program director for daytime career services at the Fuqua School of Business, has suggested, your partner's response to "How are you?" is very informative. The content and conduct of your partner's response can inform you how best to manage the rest of the conversation. If your partner delivers a short response, you know to also deliver a short response. If your partner responds with “Okay,” you know that negative signals could likely be due to that person not feeling their best. A response of “Okay” is also a good indicator that person might not be in the mood for a long dialogue. The emotional information that “How are you?” provides is not something you want miss.

Listen

This is the most overlooked step in the small talk process. You can stand out in the job search by actively listening to what people are saying. Although interrupting speakers is common in the U.S., it’s not a recommended action in the early stages of relationships. Actively listening means using facial or vocal expressions to demonstrate you understand what the speaker is saying. At the same time, you want to interpret what the person is saying to determine how you’ll respond.

As you interpret what people are saying, focus on what excites them. Pay special attention to anything that excites them and that you can directly relate to. If someone gets excited about traveling to Tokyo and you studied in Tokyo, you can use that topic to create a bond with that person.

Respond

After you listen to someone answer a question, you can determine the best way to respond based on what you heard. If you noticed a person was excited about a topic, ask a follow-up question about that topic. That’s the best option, as follow-up questions have been shown to increase likability by 20 percent. If you’re asked a question, briefly respond to the question and then ask a similar question. It’s important to reveal a bit about who you are for your small talk partners to feel comfortable sharing more about themselves. If they shared something you can directly relate to, share two sentences about how you relate to what they shared. Then ask a follow-up question about the same topic, or ask a question about a new topic.

The listen stage transitions to the response stage very quickly and requires rapid mental processing. Practice small talk in low-stakes situations to build your competence and confidence in managing the transition.

Getting Savvy

After listening and responding to your partner’s answer to “How are you today?” it’s ideal to move toward questions that get people talking about things they enjoy. Typically, people like talking about travel, food, entertainment, and weekend plans.

Here’s an example of continuing to focus the conversation on topics a person enjoys:

Student: “How was your flight?”

Recruiter: “It was alright. We ran into some delays, but we made it on time.”

Student: “I’m glad to hear it was alright in the end. Have you been to <insert present location> before?”

Recruiter: “Yes, I actually went to school here back in 2014.”

Student: “Oh, that’s great. Where was one of your favorite places to go when you lived here?”

Recruiter: “I loved going to the Korean restaurant on 5th Street. Their food was so good!”

Student: “I think I saw that place the other day. I’ll have to check it out. What was one of your favorite things to order there?”

Recruiter: “I ordered the Kimchi fried rice nearly every time! I couldn’t get enough of it.”

Student: “That sounds great. I’ll have to order that when I go.”

How Do You Manage Unfamiliar Topics in Small Talk?

Often, people feel like they can’t engage in small talk if they don’t know about the topic of discussion. If a U.S. recruiter and peer are discussing American football, many international students feel they must remain silent, attempt to change the subject, or excuse themselves from the conversation. A simple move to build trust and likability when engaging in unfamiliar topics is to take the role of a learner and ask a few questions. People enjoy teaching others about their favorite subjects. After you’ve given them the opportunity to show off their expertise, bridge the

conversation into a topic you’re more comfortable discussing.
Here’s an example of how you can handle a conversation when the topic is something you know little about:

Student: “What are you looking forward to doing this weekend?”

Recruiter: “Watching the Patriots game on Sunday.”

Student: “That sounds nice. Do you have a favorite Patriots player?”

Recruiter: “I’m a big fan of Tom Brady. Do you have a favorite team?”

Student: “I’ve heard Tom Brady is very good. I’ve been learning about many U.S. sports, but I haven’t decided on favorite teams yet. How did you pick your favorite teams?”

Recruiter: “I grew up in Boston so it was natural to become a Patriots fan.”

Student: “I’ve heard Boston is a great city. What do you recommend visiting there?” (Or, if you have visited Boston, you could speak about your impressions of the city, and then ask a question about the city based on something you visited there.)

The point here is you want to share enough information for your partner to feel like you’re invested in the conversation while asking a question after you share your response. Remember, unfamiliar topics are a great opportunity to ask questions and allow your small talk partners time to talk about something they love. The more they get to talk about what they love, the more they like you.

How Do You Know When to End Small Talk?

The short answer is to follow the lead of your small talk partner. Often, people will signal they’re ready to move on from small talk when they repeatedly look away from you, finish their drink, begin responding with shorter answers, or look at their watch. If you’re not in a meeting, then go ahead and excuse yourself.

To excuse yourself, take the following actions:

- Express how you’ve appreciated chatting with them.
- Shake hands with them.
- Share how you look forward to continue chatting with them in the future.
- Explain that you need to do something such as refresh your drink, visit the restroom, or briefly chat with a specific person who is also at the event.

If you’re engaging in small talk before an informational call, you can decide when to shift from small talk to your informational questions. Typically, it’s best to engage in two to three small talk questions before moving into your first informational questions. You can make the shift by saying, “Well, <name>, I’m so glad you’re willing to take time to speak with me. Do you mind if I jump into the questions I’ve been eager to ask you?”

If you’re engaging in small talk before a job interview, interviewers will typically move from small talk to the interview by beginning to share the interview process and asking if you’re ready to begin. Other times, they’ll signal the interview is starting by saying, “Tell me about yourself.” Either way, allow them to take the lead. If you run into a long pause, express appreciation by saying “<name>, I’m so glad to be interviewing with you today,” and then allow the interviewer to make the next move.

Small Talk Takes Practice

You’ll interact with many people throughout the job search. Sometimes you’ll do a great job engaging in small talk. Other times you’ll feel like you could have done a better job at small talk (and sometimes you’ll find recruiters who could improve their small talk skills). Know that nearly everyone, at times, experiences difficulty with small talk. Ultimately, the people who become small talk savvy are those who continue to practice their questions and responses.

Additional Resources

- *The Charisma Myth: How Anyone Can Master the Art and Science of Personal Magnetism* by Olivia Fox Cabane
- *The Fine Art of Small Talk: How to Start a Conversation, Keep It Going, Build Networking*

Skills—and Leave a Positive Impression! by Debra Fine
- *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie

Chapter 7: Networking for International Students

by Nan Liu Barnes, Generalist Coach - Specialized Master's Program, Weston Career Center, Olin Business School, Washington University in St. Louis

Like many other international students, I was very focused on the academic part of student life when I arrived in the U.S. In my junior year of college, I suddenly felt this job-seeking urgency. I was only a couple of years away from graduation, with one more summer internship opportunity left before entering the real world. As someone whose first language isn't English, who did not fully understand the rules of job seeking in the U.S., and who didn't have relevant work experience, I stepped into our campus career services office seeking help.

Looking back, I probably attended almost every workshop that didn't conflict with my class schedule. I went to information sessions for companies I didn't know existed. I participated in several career fairs even though I was so scared to talk to employers I hid in the bathroom before I talked with anyone.

Needless to say, I learned a lot in this process. But what I appreciated learning most was the unique way of American networking.

"Networking is making professional friends."—Jennifer Krupp

My favorite online definition of networking comes from Investopedia: "Networking is the exchange of information and ideas among people with a common profession or special interest, usually in an informal social setting."

I also like the short and sweet definition by my Olin Business School colleague Jennifer Krupp: "Networking is making professional friends." International students especially like it as it removes some of the anxiety from the foreign concept of networking.

Why Build Relationships When You Could Be Applying Online?

Most MBA and specialty master's programs in the U.S. last one to two years. It's common to feel like you should apply to many jobs as soon as you get to school in order to use the Optional Practical Training time permitted for your program. Why "waste" time on networking and building relationships?

As unbelievable as it might seem to you, networking is not only three times more efficient than applying online but also an unavoidable step for an international student to start a successful career in the U.S.

First, networking allows you to tap into a hidden job market that you wouldn't otherwise be able to access. Last time I checked, the hidden market made up at least 70 percent of all open positions in the U.S.

Second, networking is a great way to help you explore career interests, learn about the industry you would like to enter, and get ready for your interview success. This is extremely helpful for you to gain insights so you can answer interview questions such as "Why did you pick this industry?" and "Why do you want to work for us?"

Finally, networking is crucial as it allows you to get used to connecting with experienced professionals and build a knowledge base for the transition from student to professional. According to reports by the Graduate Management Admission Council, oral communication skills and the ability to work with others should be an international student's top priority to practice.

While classes offered through your academic program are essential to help you get the technical skills you need to be successful, you are in charge of developing your soft skills to become a highly valued professional.

How Can You Connect and Build Relationships with Other

Professionals?

The networking approach below is customized for international students. You're not alone if you're shy when it comes to initiating conversations with strangers, feeling rejected when there's no response, or worrying about the awkward silence when you don't know what to say. I hope these steps are helpful and easy to follow.

Step 1: Invite

- Ask existing friends and acquaintances for a 15- to 30-minute chat to learn about their career paths (classmates, professors, friends at the gym, people you met at a friend's party, etc.). Also, send customized invitations on LinkedIn to professional contacts you'd like to get to know (see additional resource at the end of the chapter). Note that in-person or phone chats are the best.
- Make sure that you're sincere in your desire to connect and that your contacts know you're not asking for a job, internship, or referral. Asking for advice and insight (rather than a job, internship, or referral) makes others more comfortable and more willing to respond. Be grateful to those who say yes; be understanding of those who say no or don't respond.
- If you're not sure what to say, think of times when people have reached out to you. What did they say that made you want to say yes to them?

Step 2: Prepare

- Think about what interests you about the contact's career path so far and what you want to learn the most from this person. If you need additional ideas, try searching "great informational interview questions" on the Internet.
- Write three to five of your favorite questions in your notebook.
- Learn by example and listen to podcasts of coffee chats done by other professionals. (See additional resources at the end of the chapter for some suggestions.)

Step 3: Chat

- Start with and focus on connecting. Ask questions such as "How was your weekend?" or "Do you have any fun summer plans?" (Refer to the previous chapter on small talk.)
- When you run out of topics, ask one of the questions you've prepared in your notebook.
- Take notes on key things you've learned about your contacts and the professions they're in.
- Be sure you get all of the contact information of people you chat with so you can follow up and thank them.

Step 4: Appreciate

- Refer to your notes and send a personalized email or handwritten thank-you note.
- Reciprocate if you can, and say yes to others who seek your advice and insights.

Step 5: Follow Up

- Let your contacts know if something you read or hear reminds you of them, such as articles about their companies or interesting news about their favorite restaurants in town.
- Invite your contacts to in-person chats over coffee or lunch if you're going to be near their offices.
- Keep follow-up emails short and sweet. If you have a lot that you wanted to share, maybe it's time to schedule a second chat.
- This approach helps you focus on connecting with and making professional friends. Remember, you're encouraged to ask for insights and advice, but not for jobs, internships, or referrals. The industry knowledge and connection experience you gain from networking form a foundation for your career success as an international student.

Enjoy Networking!

I never thought I would ever say, "I enjoy networking" as an introverted international student 10 years ago. While I still get nervous when I go to a new event and struggle to phrase the perfect question to ask sometimes, I fully embrace the concept of meeting and connecting with people thoughtfully. It is my hope that you'll find a networking approach that works best for you and, better yet, that you will enjoy it. Relationships take time. Will you ask someone to do coffee or lunch with you today?

Additional Resources

- "Using LinkedIn Groups to Make Great Contacts" by Beyond B School
- "How to Network Like an American" by Judy Shen-Filerman
- "7 Interview-Style Podcasts I'm Excited About In 2019" by Nan Barnes

Chapter 8: Networking Follow-Up

by David Solloway

The more time that passes after we meet people for the first time, the harder it is to remember them. Can you recall each person you've met in the last month? Can you recall what you discussed with each person? If so, you're gifted. But if not, then you're like most people, and you'll need to take notes to remember everyone you've met, which will help you maintain relationships.

In this chapter, we'll focus on how to maximize your networking efforts, reviewing four types of emails that will help you move from "potentially forgotten contact" to "recommended job applicant."

Thank-You Notes

Expressing appreciation is valued across cultures, yet so many job seekers fail to send thank-you notes after meeting someone. Many people simply forget to send a thank-you note. Others are unsure what they should write and assume they're taking less risk by not following up at all. Make sure you don't forget to send great thank-you notes by taking the following steps:

1. Set Aside Time on Your Calendar to Write the Notes.

When you decide to attend a networking event or schedule an informational call, reserve 15 minutes within 48 hours after the event or call to write thank-you notes.

2. Create a Tool to Help You Collect Information during the Networking Event or Informational Call.

To do this, you could use a Google sheet, which you could fill out on your phone in between conversations, or you could use pen and paper. Either way, make sure you collect the following info: event date, employer, name of employer representative, email of employer rep, and advice you heard from that rep.

Most of this information can be found on a person's business card. However, many people no longer carry business cards even to networking events. And those who do carry business cards quickly run out. So, make sure you're prepared to collect the information you need to send a thank-you email.

3. Write the Thank-You Note.

Start your note with a simple sentence expressing something like "Thank you for taking time to chat with me." In the next sentence, share a specific piece of advice or insight that the person passed along to you that you found helpful. If you have questions for the contacts you're writing to, use the next sentence to ask if they would be willing to discuss a few questions sometime in the next few weeks. If you don't have any questions, ask if they would be comfortable with you reaching out if you do have additional questions.

Lastly, wish them well. If, during the conversation, they mentioned they're looking forward to something, tell them you hope they have a great time doing that activity. Otherwise, finish the letter saying that you hope they have a good week or weekend (depending on the day of the week).

Often, your contacts will respond to your email saying something about how they were glad to meet you as well. However, if a contact doesn't respond, it doesn't mean your email was not valued or that you're no longer someone to consider. If you asked to chat about a few additional questions and you get a response, be sure to follow up promptly with three different dates/times you're available and mention that you can find other times if that would work better for your contact.

Following all of these steps will show the contacts in your network that you're an interested, thoughtful person who values their time and insights. An individual demonstrating those qualities during in-person and email interactions is someone many people feel comfortable introducing to others. When someone introduces you to one of their contacts, your network and candidacy grows quickly. All you need to do is ask.

Referral Requests

Referral requests are emails in which you ask if your contact would be willing to connect you with another person. To receive a positive response to a referral request you need to have shown you’re a trustworthy and likable person. You also need contacts who are willing to take the time and risk of opening their networks to someone they recently met. Often, you don’t know if those prerequisites have been achieved until you make the request. To make a referral request, take the following steps:

1. Set a Calendar Reminder to Send a Referral Request One Week after You Send Your Thank-You Note.

It’s easy to forget to send the referral request, resulting in a missed opportunity to accelerate your job search success. Leverage technology to make the most of every opportunity. If you asked your contact to chat about a few additional questions and you meet, set the reminder for one week after you meet.

2. Write the Referral Request Email.

In your email, make sure to thank the person again. People will be more willing to connect you when they see you’re a grateful person who respects others’ time and effort. Begin your email with a brief sentence expressing thanks again for talking with you a week ago.

Then, remind your contact of your interests. You can assume that your contacts are busy, so you can further demonstrate your thoughtfulness by reminding them about the topics you’re seeking to learn more about. It’s best to describe your interests in a narrow and broad sense. For example, you could mention that you’d like to continue learning more about working in a specific function where they’re employed as well as working in the broader tech industry in San Francisco.

After that, ask advice for next steps. Now that you’ve had a few exchanges to build trust and likability, you’ll have a better chance at receiving quality advice. The next line of your email should be a request for advice as to the best next steps to land a job in a specific role where they work. Your contacts’ responses will inform the level of effort you continue to exert to land a job at their employers.

Finally, ask if there’s someone you should meet. Keep this question simple by writing, “Is there anyone else you think I should meet?” If a contact recommends someone, make that person a high priority. Reach out to that person within 24 hours to ask for time to chat (and make sure to “bcc” your contact).

Check-In Emails

When people refer you, set monthly calendar notifications to check in with them. Their helpfulness is a good indicator they’d be willing to recommend you for a role. So it’s a good idea to stay in contact until you discover a role and are able to send them an application notification email (more on that below). In the first check-in email, thank your contacts for referring you to another person, recap advice your initial contact gave you, and share how you have applied it. Ask them if there is anyone else they think you should meet, and then wish them well.

In subsequent monthly emails, consider the time of year or company news and how you can use those events to wish your contacts well: “I hope you have a great Thanksgiving. Thanks again for all your guidance!” or “I just read that your company received a large investment. Congrats! I hope that increases your ability to achieve your ambitions!” If you read an article and it makes you recall a conversation you had with someone, link the article in the email and note how you thought your contact might like it.

Application Notification Emails

Neglecting to notify your employer contacts before applying is like planting a garden and not harvesting the produce.

Before you apply to a role, notify your contacts and share the following:

- You are thankful for all their guidance.
- You are excited to apply for a role at their employer.
- You are planning on applying by ____.

Close the email by asking:

- If they would be willing to recommend you for the role.
- If they have any suggestions before you apply.

You want to send an email before you apply because sometimes there's a separate application process for individuals recommended by a current employee. Furthermore, many employers offer bonuses to employees if someone they recommend is hired for a role. So it's best for all parties to connect before you apply. However, if you find yourself at risk of missing an application deadline, go ahead and apply, and then notify your contact afterwards.

Throughout your networking follow-up emails, make sure you check your grammar and punctuation with tools like Grammarly. Even if English is your first language, asking a friend or a career coach to take five minutes to review your first few emails is a good idea. This ensures that your email is easy to understand.

Additional Resources

- This chapter is strongly influenced by Steve Dalton's work, including his book *The 2-Hour Job Search: Using Technology to Get the Right Job Faster,* which includes great advice on the types of emails to send to new contacts.

Chapter 9: Behavioral Interviewing

by David Solloway and Shawn Pulscher, Associate Director, Daytime MBA Career Services, Duke University's Fuqua School of Business

What Is Behavioral Interviewing?

Behavioral interviews, which are very common in the U.S., are designed to assess how you've behaved in the past. They're asked because many employers believe that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. So, getting a better sense of how you've acted in the past helps employers project whether or not you're a good fit for the role and organization.

The good news is it's fairly easy to tell when you're being asked a behavioral question. If the interviewer starts by saying, "Can you tell me about a time you…" or "Describe a time when you…" it's very likely you're being asked a behavioral question.

What Are the Candidate's Goals in Behavioral Interviewing?

You should have goals when answering behavioral questions:

- Answer the question you were asked.
- Tell a memorable story.
- Showcase relevant—and positive—behaviors.

How Do You Make Sure You're Answering the Question You Were Asked?

Listen closely to your interviewer's question. Candidates are sometimes so focused on the next story they want to tell that they forget to listen while the interviewer is speaking. Preparation plays a big role in this; if you know your stories well, it'll help you actively listen while your interviewer is speaking.

How Do You Tell Memorable Stories?

First, focus on the things U.S. interviewers typically look for in a response:

- **A specific example.** Don't talk generally about how you tend to operate; share a specific example that helps your behaviors come to life (show, don't tell).
- **Linear structure.** U.S. interviewers tend to prefer responses told in chronological order (first, this happened; then, this happened; finally, this happened).
- **Clear articulation of your contributions.** You should be the star of each story you tell, which means you need to be comfortable saying "I" and taking credit for the good things you did. Many MBA students find this uncomfortable, but if an interviewer can't tell whether you were a driver—and not just a passenger—in a situation, they can't give you credit for the results.
- **Results that prove strong performance.** It's not enough to tell an interviewer what actions you took; you should end each response by tying positive results to those actions. Did you increase revenue? Save time or money? Earn an award for your efforts? Strong results are critical to showing how you added value to your organization.

Second, use a storytelling framework to design your stories to ensure you're delivering on what an interviewer is looking for. There are many frameworks for behavioral interviewing, but we will use the Challenge-Actions-Results (CAR) framework in this guide.

When answering a behavioral question, start by explaining the Challenge you were facing, then detail the Actions you took to overcome the challenge, and finish by sharing the quantitative and/or qualitative Results associated with your efforts. See Table 1.1 below for more information.

Table 1.1

Phase	Definition	Example

Challenge	The challenge or problem you had to overcome/solve to achieve a goal	"I wanted to invest in a new IT platform to streamline our financial reporting, but my manager didn't agree. I needed to convince her that it was the right move."
Action	The specific steps you took to solve the problem	"The first thing I did was speak with my manager to make sure I understood…"
Result	The outcome that proves your actions were good ones; quantify when possible	"Ultimately, she agreed and we implemented the new tool. As a result, we were able to reduce the time we spent finalizing our monthly financial reports by 43%."

How Do You Ensure You're Showcasing Relevant—and Positive—Behaviors?

Start by Being Employer-Centric

Being employer-centric means focusing on information that's important to the employer. To do this well, you must know what's important to your employer, the industry in which that employer operates, and the specific role you're interviewing for. Attending employer presentations, networking/conducting informational meetings, doing online research, and reviewing job descriptions are several ways in which you can determine what's important to an employer of interest.

Identify Likely Questions

How do you know which questions will be asked during an interview? Unless you can see into the future, the best approach is to put yourself in the recruiter's shoes. Based on the knowledge you've built, identify questions you would ask people if you were interviewing them for the role. Here are some questions that can help you create:

- What skills would a candidate have to possess in order to do the job? (a job description can be very helpful when answering this question)
- What questions would I ask a candidate to assess those skills?
- What behaviors would I want the candidate to demonstrate when answering my questions?

After you've narrowed down the questions, skills, and behaviors you think your target employer will want to hear, you can start building out your answers.

Build, Practice, and Refine a Roster of CAR Stories

Build out five to eight strong stories using the CAR framework detailed above, and ask friends, family members, and career coaches to conduct mock interviews with you. The feedback you receive as you deliver your stories will help you refine them. After you answer a question, ask your mock interviewers to summarize your response. If their summary doesn't answer the question you were asked, restructure your story to make sure your message is received. Learning how people are hearing your answers will ensure that you're answering questions properly from the interviewer's perspective.

Delivery Tips

Keep Each Story under Two Minutes

Even a well-structured and employer-centric story can fail to keep an interviewer's attention if it takes too long to tell. To make the most of your interviewer's time and attention, aim to deliver your answers in less than two minutes. Because interviewers are primarily interested in assessing your behaviors, spend about 60 percent of your time (about 80 seconds) on the Actions phase. The remaining 40 percent should be divided evenly between the Challenge and Results phases (about 20 seconds each).

Translate Details

When you've worked in an organization or industry for several years, it's easy to forget that some of the terminology you use regularly may be very confusing to "outsiders." When interviewing, consider your audience's perspective and do your best to translate your experience into more accessible language. This step is especially important for individuals with military, engineering, and medical backgrounds.

Provide a "Bottom Line Up Front" (BLUF)

A BLUF helps you succinctly answer a question and gives your interviewer an idea of what's to come. This approach utilizes a roughly 10-second summary before transitioning into the CAR framework. Here's an example:

- **Question:** "Can you tell me about a time you used data to solve a problem?"
- **BLUF:** "Sure, I'd like to tell you about a time I used consumer purchase data to launch our most successful new product in over five years." (about eight seconds)
- **Transition to CAR:** "For years, we'd struggled to launch a breakthrough product…"

Answering Negative Questions

When answering negatively framed questions (such as "Can you tell me about a time you failed?"), clearly state your failure/weakness. Interviewers do not appreciate when candidates reframe a strength as a weakness (such as saying, "My greatest weakness is that I'm a perfectionist"). Saying you can't think of a failure is also unacceptable. Share a failure/weakness from early in your career, but spend the majority of your response time on a CAR story that shows how you've made progress on overcoming that failure/weakness. Here's an example:

- **Question:** "Can you tell me about a time you failed?"
- **Response:** "During my first year at Visa, I dropped the ball on a big initiative by not getting our sales director's feedback before taking a recommendation to the VP of marketing. Thankfully, I was presented with an opportunity to redeem myself shortly thereafter when I was tasked to lead a cross-functional task force. Learning from my past failure, I made sure to gather feedback from all internal stakeholders before presenting to the executive team."

Discussing failure can be especially uncomfortable when you come from cultures that value saving face. Try to remember that interviewers ask these questions not to cause embarrassment but to give you an opportunity to show you possess the leadership qualities of resilience and honesty.

Final Thoughts

Don't think of a behavioral interview as an oral exam that requires you to memorize and recite "correct" answers. Rather, think of it as a conversation with a future colleague and/or manager—one that gives you an opportunity to demonstrate you can do the job. By actively listening to your interviewer, telling memorable stories, and showcasing relevant—and positive—behaviors, you'll be able to do just that!

Additional Resources

- *The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business* by Erin Meyer
- *Vault Guide to the Case Interview, 8th Edition* by Laurence Shatkin, Mark Asher, Eric Chung, and the Staff of Vault
- *Vault Guide to Finance Interviews, Ninth Edition* by Laurence Shatkin, D. Bhatawedekhar, Dan Jacobson, Hussam Hamadeh, and William Jarvis

Chapter 10: Tips for Internship Success

by Denise Karaoli

Every year, students ask me what it takes to be successful in their internships. My short answer is it depends on what they want from their internships. For some, their internships are ways to develop skill sets they can use to get full-time offers upon graduation from firms other than the ones they interned with. For others, they hope to get full-time offers from the companies they interned with. As you'll learn, internships come in two main types:

1. *Experience opportunities* in which you gain valuable work experience but the companies you intern with are not in a position to hire MBAs.
2. *Pipeline opportunities* in which, if you do an excellent job and, depending on the number of full-time opportunities available, companies are in a position to offer you a full-time job upon completion.

This chapter discusses the second type, pipeline opportunities. It will focus on how you can do an excellent job in your internship and hopefully get a full-time offer. But before we discuss success factors, it's important to understand that the expectation of employers in the U.S. might be different from those in other countries.

Internships in the U.S. offer important responsibilities and require you to create deliverables and be an integral part of the company on day one. Companies expect you to add value as soon as possible during your internship, take full responsibility for your work, and produce exceptional results.

There are five components of a successful internship:

- Preparation
- Communication
- Productivity
- Results
- Fit

Preparation

Before your internship, you need to learn as much possible about the company you're interning with, the company's culture, the industry the company operates in, your function, and your responsibilities. While some companies will offer very short training programs, many will expect you to add value on day one even before training. Either way, you have to do your homework to make sure you show up ready to be an integral part of the team.

One thing that's essential to understand if you haven't worked in the U.S. is how important it is to learn about the company culture. The reason is, eventually, your hiring will depend on whether you can fit into the company culture. One thing you can do before your internship to help you understand the culture as soon as possible is follow up with all the people you've been networking with, including the current students at your school that have already had an internship with the company. Give them the good news, if they don't know already, about you being hired, and discuss with them the particularities of the company culture such as:

- Do employees communicate mostly in-person or over the phone?
- Is there a formal documentation process?
- How much is speed valued?
- Are decisions made individually or by group consensus?
- Is decision-making formal or informal?

If you can figure out how employees work together and what those expectations are it will save you days and weeks of figuring out this information once you're an intern, when you could be focusing on your deliverables and getting to know others in the firm.

Communicating

In a previous chapter, we discussed the importance of understanding the U.S. business culture for communicating, evaluating, leading, deciding, trusting, disagreeing, scheduling, and persuading. What I want to discuss here is feedback. Feedback, which might not be stressed in other cultures, shows that you’re committed to your internship experience. As you’ll see, asking for feedback is highly valued in the U.S., and you’re not only expected to ask for feedback but also digest feedback from others.

There are certain nuances when asking for and receiving feedback that are important to understand to be successful. Here are some tips for asking for and giving feedback:

Asking for Feedback

If you want to know how you’re doing during your internship, don’t ask directly for feedback but rather ask how you can improve. You might ask how or what you could have done better, for example. It’s also a good idea to ask your peers (other interns) for feedback as well as your managers. And ask for specific examples when you do ask for feedback.

Giving Feedback

If a person asks you for feedback, give it purposely and politely without excuses—give constructive (not negative) feedback. Also, during a meeting, don’t wait to be asked to give feedback but rather give your opinions, suggestions, and solutions at the right time—look for pauses in the conversation during the meeting.

Understanding the basics of asking and giving feedback will also help you at school, as you will be required to frequently receive and give feedback while a student.

Productivity

In high-context cultures (such as certain East Asian countries), some of the productivity is impacted by indirect communication, distinct group processes, and highly defined standardized procedures. However, in low-context cultures such as the U.S., productivity is immediate (you need to get to the point quickly and waste little time on small talk or breaks), quick (time is money, so speed is valued more than perfection), polychromic (you must work on multiple tasks and projects at the same time), and schedule-focused (the culture is deadline-driven, agenda-driven, and rigid), plus you need to always keep the goal in mind.

To be as productive as you can in the U.S., you’ll need to know your employers’ expectations. This includes the following:

- Understanding your deliverables and deadlines
- Knowing what’s expected to be a successful intern to get a full-time offer (if applicable)
- Knowing that you have real responsibilities and are expected to add immediate value
- Starting on projects right away and establishing your “go-to” colleagues for questions
- Establishing weekly update meetings for feedback

Start Networking

In order to be as productive as possible, it’s important to network throughout your internship, taking any opportunity to meet and get to know your colleagues. Make sure to make yourself known and your work known. Find advocates who will promote you and recommend you for a full-time offer. And remember to immediately introduce yourself to other team members, including interns, managers, and assistants. You will want to network vertically (with those at lower and higher levels than you) and horizontally (with those at your same level—your fellow interns).

Ensure Productivity on Projects

To make sure you’re as productive as possible on your projects, you will need to do three things:

1. *Clarify the project.* This means making sure you know exactly what the deliverables are, not assuming that “figuring it out on your own” shows competence, asking for feedback and asking for others’ expertise when needed, and being there to help others as well.
2. *Clarify the results.* This means you need to be willing to constantly define and redefine the project as it moves forward. At first, you might have a project with set expectations, but as issues arise such as new deadlines and a change in a manager’s expectation, the project will become somewhat fluid. If you have an issue and can’t move forward with the original plan, you might need to discuss with your manager how to recalibrate. In other words, make sure to understand the project and what you need to do to get it done, but be open to the project changing as it progresses.
3. *Keep the project on track.* This means you need to keep your manager informed of your

timeline. Meet deadlines if possible, but if you need a deadline extended, give your supervisor early forewarning with an explanation of why you need an extension. Also, don't be afraid to challenge ideas if you think the project is going in the wrong direction.

Results

Your success will be determined by the results you achieve—results determine merit. During your internship, you'll be evaluated by your results as well as the ideas and suggestions that you produce. You'll want to focus on exceeding expectations within the parameters of the company's culture, and while final results are important, the process and how you approach the results also matter. And remember, your results won't matter unless others know of them.

With that in mind, here are some tips to help you communicate your results:

Sharing Your Results with Your Manager

- Share your progress on your projects
- Point out serious challenges and propose solutions
- Discuss current outcomes
- Pass along your ideas and other areas of interest (other things you'd like to work on and gain experience in)
- Ask for your manager's support if needed
- Ask for feedback

Sharing Your Results with Others

- Work laterally and vertically across the organization
- Share your findings and what you find exciting about your project

It's also extremely important to ensure that your results are meeting your manager's expectations and to set up a regular meeting schedule to continually update your manager about your progress. During these meetings, make sure to ask if your manager believes your progress, focus, and results are in line with the expectations of a successful intern. You should also ask which things you could improve on. And when you're asked how everything is going for you, simply saying "fine" is not an acceptable answer. Instead, make sure to answer in detail, getting as specific as possible. These meetings, like your work and your network of other employees, will affect your receiving a full-time offer or not at the end of your internship.

Fit

If your goal is to receive an offer at the end of your internship, you will need to "fit" into the company and be able to work within their teams. Describing the essence of "fit," one student once said to me, "It doesn't matter if you have the best technical skills; interpersonal soft skills are the keys to company fit."

Here are some tips for showing that you're a good fit for the company:

1. *Know your colleagues.* This includes being curious about your colleagues, asking them about their interests outside of work, summer vacation plans, family (if they offer up that type of information), pets, and professional and career trajectory.
2. *Know how to work with your colleagues' work ethic and style.* This includes being flexible with when and where your colleagues work (some employees have flexible schedules where they can work remotely or at home part of the time). It also means finding out if your colleagues like to go out for lunch, eat lunch at their desks while continue to work, etc. The point here is to be accommodating and respectful of how, when, and where others like to work.
3. *Be politically correct.* Never breed negativity, and always be respectful of all colleagues, regardless of their personal characteristics, including race, gender, and sexual orientation.
4. *Be loyal to the company and respect its community.*
5. *Remember that you're always being evaluated on how you fit into the community, as well as on your performance.*

Finally, during your internship, just as the company is evaluating you to see if you would be a good fit, it's important to remember that you should be evaluating the company to see if it would be a good fit for you and your career goals.

Additional Resources

- *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler. How to communicate the best when it matters the most, and how to speak up and voice your opinions persuasively.
- *The MBA Guide to Networking Like a Rockstar: The Ultimate Guide to Navigating the Complex MBA Landscape to Stand Out Among Top-Caliber Candidates* by Jaymin Patel. Helpful for your continued networking needs. Helps you to build confidence and get yourself known at the company to get that job offer.
- *What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful* by Marshall Goldsmith. Great sections on feedback, apologizing, selling yourself, listening, thanking, following up, and practicing feedforward.

Chapter 11: Negotiating the Offer

by Annie Marra, International MBA Career Services Advisor, Cornell University's SC Johnson Graduate School of Management

Over the years, I've helped dozens of MBA students evaluate their job offers, devising personalized compensation negotiation strategies for them. It's one my favorite parts of my job. I love helping students talk their way into an extra $5,000 or $10,000 or $20,000!

That said, when international students approach the negotiation table, there are often additional pressures and concerns at play that can prevent them from talking about money. In addition to needing a little encouragement to consider negotiation an option, they need to be ready to talk about more than just money: they need to be prepared to talk about work authorization and to make plans for the different scenarios they may encounter.

While there are a lot of great resources out there offering compensation negotiation advice, there are very few resources that address the specific negotiation concerns and work authorization needs of international students. In this chapter, my goal is to help fill this information gap by addressing the following: why international MBAs should consider asking for more money, what exactly can be negotiated, and how to talk about work authorization needs, specifically about OPT and H-1B visas.

Why International Students Don't Usually Negotiate

MBAs tend to have an incredible amount of expertise, skill, and energy to offer. But I've found that international students can sometimes lose sight of the inherent value they bring, leading them to feel as though they don't have any leverage to negotiate.

For international students, this problem is often compounded by the stress and pressures of the U.S. job search. For many international students, finding work in the U.S. is more than a goal—it's a necessity. International students often take out loans that will need to be paid back soon after graduation—and in U.S. dollars. The prospect of returning to a different economy, especially for many students from certain regions, is simply not a realistic option. This financial burden, combined with familial expectations for professional success and additional financial support, can result in an incredible amount of pressure.

Of course, this pressure has an incredible impact on a student's willingness to even consider negotiation. Because job offers feel desperately needed and have been so doggedly pursued, they also can feel dangerously fragile. Many international students will not consider negotiating because they fear any request or question about the offer terms will result in the offer being withdrawn. Many also fear that since they're not American, they automatically have less to offer. In my experience working with international students, these are the top two fears that keep people from seriously considering negotiation. And I would like to encourage all international students to fight these fears and give negotiating a try.

In my experience, I've never seen an offer for an international or a domestic student withdrawn when the student was negotiating for something reasonable in a professional way. Ever. If you're asking for something reasonable, and you're professional in your conduct, you will either get a yes or a no. Not a pulled offer. That said, there are a handful of times that I have seen offers withdrawn, and I think it's important to note the clear themes in these instances. Each time it was due to the way the student approached the negotiation. Either the students asked for amounts of money that were unreasonably high (think almost $50k higher than a competitive rate of pay when they had a typical MBA graduate profile) or they approached the negotiation with an aggressive "give me this or I walk" attitude.

As long as you approach negotiating with a professional tone, a humble yet confident demeanor, and ask for reasonable things, you shouldn't be concerned that your offer will be withdrawn.

Why International Students Should Consider Negotiation

Now let's talk about what you have to offer as an international student. Remember, negotiation is all about leverage, and as international students you have more to offer than you realize.

An interesting result of the current immigration climate is that you are often either exceptionally qualified or overqualified for the positions you are offered. Due to factors such as H-1B visa lottery odds, rising rates of Requests for Evidence, and increased delays in OPT processing times, the risk a company associates with taking on international talent can be perceived as higher than the risk associated with domestic talent. This means the case for an international candidate often has to be compelling.

Luckily for you, the case for international talent is often quite strong. It is not uncommon for international MBAs to have higher levels of formal education, additional certifications, more work experience, and a professional profile that aligns tightly with the job offer in hand. In addition to competitive credentials and experience, it is also common for international students to have superb analytical skills; experience leading global projects, global teams, or large arms of family businesses; and an understanding of how to navigate complex public and private domains in rapidly evolving markets. You should think of negotiation as the process of exploring how your current compensation package can be increased to reflect the unique attributes that allow you to bring superior value to the company. From this perspective, you can more easily see how these qualifications justify your exploring potential areas of flexibility to make the offer more competitive.

What Can Be Negotiated

MBA job offers usually come in the form of offer packages, and these offer packages typically include different compensation components. For example, a standard MBA compensation package will include: base salary, signing bonus, annual bonus, relocation package, a long-term savings option (401k), health care, and paid time off. While most MBAs will focus on negotiating the base salary, it's important to remember that you may be able to find flexibility in any of these components.

For this reason, I typically encourage students to sort the components of their offer packages into two buckets: monetary items and nonmonetary items. Monetary items, or monetaries, are anything that puts money directly into your pockets, either now or later. These can include: base salary, singing bonus, relocation stipends, stock options (vesting or nonvesting), 401(k) matching/donation plans, etc. Nonmonetaries are items that either prevent money from coming out of your pocket or items that have nothing to do with money at all. Examples of nonmonetaries that keep money from coming out of your pocket include: tuition reimbursement, relocation reimbursement, child care, health care, and stipends for housing, transportation, and parking.

Nonmonetaries, which have nothing to do with money, are often key negotiation pieces for international students. I often refer to nonmonetaries as "logistical concerns": start date, title, office location, team assignment, work authorization options like H-1B visa filing arrangements, and back-up visa plans (alternative visas that may be pursued, global office transfers, returning to school, etc.).

How to Talk about Work Authorization

In addition to shying away from negotiation compensation, international students often hesitate to talk openly with their employers about sponsorship. Let me be clear: You should always discuss a plan for work authorization. This conversation should happen after any monetary negotiation has taken place, and it should cover these three areas: start date, initial visa petition plans and alternative visa petition plans, and last resorts.

Start Date

With the recent rise of more significant OPT delays, international students should be applying for OPT as soon as possible and negotiating a start date that is as late as possible. Most MBA offers will propose start dates in the months of June or July. Sometimes these dates can be negotiated out into late July, August, or even September. With OPT processing times reaching four to five months in some USCIS processing centers, it's exceptionally wise for you to suggest a start date that will allow for plenty of OPT processing time.[1]

When approaching this conversation, I suggest two phases. First, find a personal reason to ask to move the start date back by just a few weeks. Family vacation, personal travel, relocating family, and selling a home are all justifiable reasons to request a little bump in the start date. Whatever may be true for your personal situation is the reason you should give.

Whether this ask is successful or not, you should then work with your employer to identify a "worst-case scenario" start date. This date should be projected based off of your OPT filing date and should assume the worst case—that your OPT takes a full four to five months to process.[2]

The conversation could look like this:

Student: "Thanks for looking at the comp package with me. I really appreciate your flexibility."

Hiring Manager: "No problem."

Student: "Before we sign off, I have a few logistical pieces I would like to talk about with you. These include the start date and work authorization. Maybe we can first chat a bit about the start date?"

Hiring Manager: "Sure."

Student: "Great. On the offer letter, the start date is listed as June 15th. I was wondering if we could bump it back to July 1st? My family will be visiting for graduation, and since they're traveling from India, we were hoping to tour the U.S. for a few weeks before I move to [city] to settle in. Do you think we might have a little wiggle room here to accommodate a bit of travel?

Whether or not this accommodation can be made, at least you attempted to bump back your start date for a reasonable personal reason. After this, discuss a "worst-case scenario" start date.

Student: "[Perfect, we'll move to July 1st for the start date.] or [Okay, we'll keep the start date at June 15th.] There's one more piece I'd like to discuss here. My school has been keeping a close eye on immigration trends for international students. They advised all of us that there have been some delays in OPT card processing at the national level and that this has been impacting start dates from time to time. I applied for my OPT card as early as possible on [month/day], but on the off chance we may be impacted by these delays, do you think we could work together to identify a second worst-case scenario start date just in case? I've already counted the days, and it looks like in the worst-case scenario of a five-month delay, [month/day] would be a safe alternative start date. I know this would be a huge ask, but if it came to it, how close to this date do you think we may be able to get?"

Initial Visa Petition Plans and Alternative Visa Petition Plans

After discussing the start date, you should shift to a conversation about which visas will be filed and when. Since most of you will file for an H-1B visa, I'll walk you through how to have a conversation about the H-1B. There are three main steps:

- Confirming the company's plans to file for an H-1B
- Exploring the company's willingness to file for an H-1B several times (if your situation allows)
- Presenting any alternative options you may be eligible for due to your personal/professional situation

First, confirm with the company that the plan is to apply for an H-1B visa the year after you graduate. Then, if you know you might be eligible to apply for an H-1B more than once, broach this subject to explore the company's interest in filing multiple times.2 Finally, start thinking about secondary visa petition plans you may be eligible for due to your personal/professional situation. These are best discussed with your personal immigration attorney before being presented to the company as potential back-up options to an H-1B.

Here's what this conversation could look like:

Student: "Okay, great. Thank you. Could we also chat just a bit about our H-1B visa filing, just to make sure we're on the same page?"

Hiring Manager: "Sure."

Student: "Great. The current plan is to file for the H-1B visa next year, April 20XX, correct?"

Hiring Manager: "Yes."

Student: "Perfect. You know, I heard from my career advisor and confirmed with our school's registrar that, if we wanted, the company could also file an H-1B petition for me this April [20XX]. This could give us two opportunities to file for an H-1B, once this year and once next year, greatly increasing our odds at securing one. Here's how this works. It's a special situation. Although I graduate in May, my school allows students to complete all graduation requirements by mid-March so that they can issue a letter on our behalf that verifies that, though we haven't graduated, we've completed all required course work and are guaranteed to graduate in May. These letters have been accepted by USCIS as good enough proof to use for an initial H-1B visa filing. I'm on track to complete all of my classes by mid-March. Do you think the company would be interested in filing up to two times to increase our odds—once this year, and once next year, if it's needed?"

Hiring Manager: "Yes, I don't see why not."

Student: "Perfect. Thank you. And should we run into any obstacles here, there could be a few other options to pursue. I've already been in detailed talks with my personal immigration attorney, and she thinks we could also investigate…"

Last Resorts

Finally, after discussing start date and H-1B filing options, you should talk with your employer about a plan for your employment should there not be a path forward for work authorization in the U.S. For many students, this will be either a transfer to an international office or termination of employment. While a transfer to a global office is ideal, if this is not something the employer will be able to do, then at least you'll know going into the visa process that you may need to make alternative preparations.

Here is a way you could approach this conversation:

Student: "While I know we don't want to think about the worst-case scenario, our school has also been advising that we talk with our employers about what they'd be able and willing to do if none of our plans for securing work authorization come through. I've read that some companies will explore moving the talent to another global office, with a tentative plan to be brought back to the U.S. on an L visa later on. Do you think this is something we could discuss?"

A Final Note

Negotiating is difficult for almost everyone, and it can be especially difficult for international students. My hope is that this chapter has encouraged you to see negotiation as a possibility, given you specific and important logistical considerations to discuss with your employer, and given you sample language to help prepare you for negotiations when the time is right.

Footnotes

1. Currently, international students who studied in the U.S. full time on an F-1 visa for at least one academic year are eligible to apply for OPT 90 days before graduation, and they can choose an OPT start date that is up to 60 days after graduation. This means if a student plays their timetables right, they can give themselves upwards of 150 days of OPT processing time—about four to five months. Processing times by field office or service center can be found on the USCIS website.
2. Some international MBAs are in situations that would allow them to file more than once for an H-1B visa. For example, if the student has a degree with a STEM designation, that could allow for up to 36 months of OPT, which could also allow for several H-1B visa filings. Or, depending on the way your school's MBA program is structured, there may be a way for the company to file for an H-1B in April of their graduation year.

Chapter 12: Recruiting for the Next Year

by David Solloway

Recruiting for full-time opportunities begins during your internship—not after it. So, throughout your internship, make sure to focus on building relationships with your direct managers and other managers and directors in the organization. Use their insights to do a great job on your projects, and seek to join projects that will help build out your resume for your full-time job search. For example, if you don't have much quant experience, look for an opportunity to contribute to an analysis or modeling project. As you come to the end of your internship, you should begin to increase the time you allocate toward preparing for your full-time search.

There are three steps to launching a successful full-time search during the end of an internship:

- Assessing your career direction
- Refreshing your job search tools
- Thanking your advocates and activating your network

Assessing Your Career Direction

Block time on your calendar around the last two weeks of your internship to assess your internship experience, asking yourself the following questions:

- What are the top five things you enjoyed about your internship experience?
- What are the top five things you did not enjoy about your internship experience?
- If your internship employer gave you a full-time offer, how would you like that opportunity to be similar to your internship? How would you like it to be different?

Next, use the insights gained from assessing your internship experience to determine which career direction you want to pursue for full-time opportunities.

It's surprisingly easy and common to choose a career direction that doesn't align with your values. Many people arrive at the midpoint of their professional life feeling unfulfilled and lamenting that they chose a career without considering their values. Don't underestimate the power of cognitive biases to steer you in directions that leave you stressed and disappointed years later. Although you can pivot career directions throughout your life, taking time at the end of your internship to consider how your values align with potential career directions can lessen a lack of fulfillment later in your career.

Many people find it helpful to take 20 minutes to create a grid on which they list potential full-time roles and rate how they align with their values. Here's the quickest way to explore your career/value alignment:

1. Draw a grid with four columns.
2. On the three columns furthest to the right, list the top three career directions you're considering. Include the full-time career direction that might arise from your internship.
3. In the empty column to the left, write down what is important to you now and in the future. Those are your values. Values people have noted in the past include:
   - Spending time with family
   - Opportunity to travel
   - Building connections to start a nonprofit in 10 years
   - Staying in the U.S.
   - Opportunity to be challenged more each day
4. Rate how much each value would be fulfilled in each role on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest. Feel free to weight the values based on which values matter most to you.
5. Add up the total for each career direction column.

The career direction with the highest total gives you an idea of where you should allocate the most energy. The next highest can give you an idea of a "plan b" for your full-time search. See below for an example:

	Return to Consulting	Pivot to Corporate Finance	Pivot to Product Management
Value #1	4	2	3
Value #2	3	5	2

Value #3	2	5	3
Total	9	**12**	8

After you complete the career/value assessment and internship, you'll have a clearer idea of the opportunities you'd like to pursue next. If you'd like additional tools to assess your career direction, check out the Odyssey Planning tool from Dave Evans's book Designing Your Life or download an "Ikigai" diagram worksheet. After using the tools that work for you, refresh your other job search tools.

Refreshing Your Job Search Tools

Once you identify the types of roles you'll pursue for a full-time search, update your job search tools.

Resume/LinkedIn

Add your internship experience to your resume and LinkedIn profile. As you write your bullet points for the internship experience, prioritize the accomplishments that highlight skills not evident in your previous experience. As a reminder, accomplishment statements are created by selecting an action you took that contributed to a specific result.

Interview Responses

As you might have learned from your internship search, informational meetings and calls can quickly turn into interviews. Before you begin meeting with employers, think through how you'll include your internship experience in your response to the request, "Tell me about yourself." Your contacts from your internship search will also likely ask, "How was your internship?" So be prepared to describe two to three highlights from the experience. In addition, you'll want to summarize how your internship experience has informed your full-time search so you're ready to answer questions about why you're pursuing opportunities other than ones at your internship employer.

List of Target Employers

Location, industry, and function are the three most common considerations international students have when building a target list of employers.

If you decide the U.S. is a top target location, identify employers that have sponsored international students for full-time visas in the last few years. The fastest way to identify U.S. employers likely to sponsor someone with your degree is to ask your career services office if they can share a list of employers international alumni have worked for on a full-time basis. If your career services office doesn't have the data, use the UCSIS H-1B Employer Data Hub.

Recruiting Timeline

Don't expect full-time recruiting timelines to be the same as the internship recruiting timelines. Full-time recruiting timelines vary by industry and location. Ask your career services team about the timeline you can expect for your target industry and location. If your career services team doesn't have a timeline by industry, search online for full-time recruiting timelines. Business school students should look at the data Transparent Career provides. You can also gain timeline insights by asking your contacts in your target industry/location.

Review Work Authorization

Work authorization also changes for full-time roles. After accepting a full-time role in the U.S., it is most likely that you'll start with 12 months of Optional Practical Training (OPT) work authorization. If you're graduating with a STEM degree, you might be eligible for an additional 24 months of OPT. Eventually, most international employees ask their employer to sponsor them for an H-1B visa.

Not every employer knows about work authorizations, and knowing how to explain the basics can contribute to job opportunities. There are also deadlines associated with work authorization so be sure to connect with your school's visa services team or international advisors as you begin your full-time job search.

Thanking Your Advocates and Activating Your Network

Assuming you decide to apply for full-time opportunities (which might include your internship employer), start the search by expressing thanks.

First, send emails to the colleagues who helped you during your internship. Cite a specific quality or insight about each person you found helpful during your internship, and mention how you’re grateful for their help and the chance to have worked with them. Also mention that you’ll stay in touch as you discern your next career move.

Then, send emails to your contacts at other employers who helped you during your internship. Thank them for helping you during the internship search, briefly sharing a highlight of what you learned from your internship and the career direction you’re pursuing for full-time opportunities. Ask them about their summer and what advice they have for you as you start your full-time search.

Your full-time job search builds on your previous experiences. You can leverage your existing contacts to jump start a successful search, but before you do, set aside time for assessment and refreshing your job search tools. Those few actions can save you from many challenges and increase the likelihood you’ll achieve your goals during your full-time search.

Additional Resources

- *Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-Lived, Joyful Life* by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans
- *The 2-Hour Job Search: Using Technology to Get the Right Job Faster* by Steve Dalton
- GoinGlobal.com country guides for visa info by country
- USCIS H-1B Employer Data Hub
- Transparent Career for hiring timelines

About the Authors

Nan Liu Barnes
Generalist Coach - Specialized Master's Program, Weston Career Center, Olin Business School, Washington University in St. Louis
Nan holds a BA in economics and a master's degree in accounting, both from Washington University in St. Louis. After several years of corporate accounting experience, she decided to pursue her passion in career coaching to give back to her alma mater for everything she learned as an international student. Outside of work, Nan enjoys spending time with her family, volunteering at her church, and watching home renovation shows and Chinese dramas.

Kimberly Blanchard
Cross-Cultural Management Consultant, Speaker, and Executive Coach
Kimberly has more than 20 years of experience in global leadership, multicultural team development, and leveraging diversity for the benefit of individuals and teams across multinational organizations. Kimberly has helped more than 10,000 leaders become more effective across cultures, having designed and led cultural diversity trainings in more than 35 countries with dozens of international companies. Kimberly holds a master's degree in intercultural relations from Lesley University in Cambridge and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Florida. She has spent over half of her adult life living and working in Germany, Italy, and Jordan, and is currently based in New York City.

J. Scott Brownlee
Career Consultant, Texas McCombs Full-Time MBA Program, University of Texas at Austin
At Texas McCombs, J. Scott creates and launches new career enhancement efforts to help MBA students maintain active, data-driven job searches based on passion and curiosity. He is also the co-founder of Networth, a career and MBA admissions consultancy focused on the millennial generation and the future of work.

Denise Karaoli
Director for International Student Careers, Career Development Center, Darden School of Business, University of Virginia
Denise Karaoli joined the Career Development Center at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business in 2006 and now serves as Darden's director for international student careers. Prior to joining Darden, she was part of the senior leadership at the University of Virginia, working on international initiatives and strategy in the school's President and Provost Office. Prior to that position, she worked in the Office of the Secretary at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Denise spent the majority of her nonacademic career with East Asian, European, and Middle Eastern marketing and consulting firms. Denise received an MA in international relations from the University of Kent and a BS in cross-cultural studies from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. She also studied at McGill University in Canada.

Dana Lam
ESL and B-Speak Instructor, Speak! Language Center, Charlottesville, Va.
Dana holds a master's degree in applied linguistics and a TESOL certificate, and she has been teaching ESL to adults for more than seven years. She has taught around the U.S. in a variety of settings, including public schools, private universities, nonprofits, and language centers. Dana is passionate about empowering students with the linguistic and cultural knowledge they need to succeed.

Daniel Liu
Director of Career Management, Texas McCombs Full-Time MBA Program, University of Texas at Austin
At Texas McCombs, Daniel oversees a team of career consultants, industry career consultants, and second-year Career Fellows. Over the past five years, he's worked closely with domestic and international MBA students across functions to successfully navigate the MBA job search process. Prior to McCombs, Daniel spent more than five years with Deloitte Consulting on strategic IT assessments and large-scale technology modernization projects and was heavily involved with campus recruiting and new hire onboarding.

Annie Marra
International MBA Career Services Advisor, Cornell University's SC Johnson Graduate School of Management
Annie received her master's in higher education and university administration from Geneva College in 2011 and quickly found her professional niche in MBA career services. Annie

currently serves as an international MBA career services advisor with Cornell University's SC Johnson Graduate School of Management. Prior to her work at Cornell, Annie supported international MBAs with Purdue’s Krannert School of Management. Annie also serves as the in-house specialist for MBA offer evaluation and salary negotiation, and supports the broader MBA CSEA community as a co-chair for the Research and Trends Committee.

Abby Pollard
Career Consultant, Texas McCombs Full-Time MBA Program, University of Texas at Austin
Abby has been a career consultant with the Texas McCombs School of Business for three years. In her current role, she advises full-time MBA students pursuing careers in finance, energy, and real estate. Prior to joining the MBA team in 2017, she worked with specialty master of science students in the business analytics, finance, and marketing programs. Before joining McCombs, Abby spent two years as a campus recruiter for a global investment management firm. She has more than 10 years of experience working in various corporate environments and industries and is passionate about inspiring others to design fulfilling careers.

Shawn Pulscher
Associate Director, Daytime MBA Career Services, Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business
Shawn is a career coach, former CPG brand manager, and U.S. Air Force veteran. He works as the associate director for Daytime MBA Career Services at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business.

David Solloway
Assistant Director, Daytime MBA Career Services, Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business
Dave is a career consultant, life coach, and cross-cultural training/development specialist. He works as the assistant director for Daytime MBA Career Services at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business.

About the Editor

Derek Loosvelt
Senior Finance Editor, Vault.com
Derek has a BS in economics from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and an MFA in creative writing from the New School. His writing has appeared in several online and print publications. Previously, he worked in investment banking as an M&A analyst and associate.

Acknowledgements

Vault would like to express its sincere gratitude to all of the guide's authors—Nan Liu Barnes, Kimberly Blanchard, J. Scott Brownlee, Denise Karaoli, Dana Lam, Daniel Liu, Annie Marra, Abby Pollard, Shawn Pulscher, and David Solloway. These career services experts all took time out of their very busy schedules to write extremely thoughtful, helpful, and informative chapters. We very much appreciate all of their time and hard work spent on this project.

Vault would also like to express a special thanks to Denise Karaoli and her team at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business. Denise and her team were integral to the creation of this guide, particularly with respect to outlining the guide's contents and putting together such a talented group of career services professionals (and writers!). We're extremely grateful for the considerable work and effort Denise put in to make this guide a reality.

Finally, Vault would like to dedicate this guide to all of the international students currently working toward their MBAs as well as the international students who'll be doing so in the future. You're an essential part of the U.S. workforce, and the Vault team is grateful to be able to offer you help as you work toward your dream jobs and career goals.

Thank you!

—The Vault team